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AUTHOR Schneider, Larissa A.
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ABSTRACT

Understanding the cognitive principles inherent in schematic concepts can enhance the practice of fundamental public relations activities. Schemata dictate what information will be attended to, what interpretations will be made of it, and how it will be remembered. Both self-schemata and other-schemata help individuals organize and interpret their environment. This concept of self versus other schemata has implications for all information programs, especially in regard to the memory function of information processing. Since a number of pieces of information or experience produces complex schemata, the public relations practitioner should realize that mere exposure to a series of communications on a single topic could produce more mature schemata than those resulting from a single article, report, or release. Timing is another key variable in the practitioner's understanding of how schemata dictate thoughts on and affective reactions to messages. To judge from the effects of mass media press releases, public relations staffers should allow readers or viewers time to mull over message content. The timing for releasing information is also critical. By tailoring messages to fit an intended audience's schemata, public relations practitioners can have a greater influence on message impact. (HOD)

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF THE SCHEMA FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

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By

Larissa A. Schneider

College Park, MD 20742

(301) 454-6936

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Running Head: Implications of Schema

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ABSTRACT

Schemata are the internal cognitive structures that play a critical role in information processing. These hierarchically arranged beliefs become the perspective a person uses to select, interpret, and remember messages. They are revised continually as a result of exposure to new messages. By understanding how these new data fit the existing pattern, or schema, public relations practitioners can structure the content of their newsletters, speeches, and informational campaigns most effectively.

Implications of the Concept of the Schema for Public Relations

Researchers studying the effects of the mass media on consumers have come to look not at what messages do to those readers and viewers but what the audience does to the messages. Do with rather than do to have almost become cliches, typically italicized, in the jargon of broadcast and print-media scholars.

This orientation seems appropriate for the recipients of persuasive messages generated by public relations professionals as well. Until recently, however, this reconceptualization was not part of the language describing the public relations process. Now, with the concept of the schema becoming prevalent in the literature of social and cognitive psychology, researchers in public relations can take advantage of a more realistic view of the nature of persuasive communication.

This study will argue that the principles of cognition inherent in the schematic concept can enhance the practice of fundamental public relations activities. Understanding cognitive responses helps the public relations practitioner in writing news releases, making speeches, producing employee newsletters, acting as a liaison between the organization and key external groups and individuals, and counseling management in all of these areas. The expectation of these practices will be shifted from the traditional notion of external to the more recent understanding of self-generated attitude change.

The study begins with various definitions of the term schema and

descriptions of this cognitive process. It continues by examining the role of schemata in information processing. It also considers two key variables in the process: complexity of the schema and centrality of the message to the recipient. Throughout, it deals with the implications these factors hold for the public relations professional.

Definitions

> The internal cognitive structures called schemata are: sets of rules or generalizations derived from past experience that organize and guide information processing about ourselves and others in our social experience. Schemata represent a person's complex of beliefs and feelings about, or world view of, some area of experience. They are assumptions about relations among, or the co-occurrence of, behaviors, characteristics, and events associated with that area of experience. (Smith, 1982, pp. 28-29; for similar descriptions, see Taylor & Crocker, 1981, and Markus, 1977.)

The assumed relationships or co-occurrence of beliefs have also been called "economy measures" that allow for subsuming and remembering separate but similar happenings in terms of one "standardized episode" (Schank & Abelson, 1977). They are known alternately as scripts (Abelson, 1976), frames (Minsky, 1975), thematic structures (Lingle, Geva, Ostrom, Leippe, & Baumgardner, 1979), themes (Lingle & Ostrom, 1981), prototypes (Cantor & Mischel, 1977), and personal constructs (Kelly, 1955). First mention of schema in this sense, though, has

been credited to Bartlett in his research on text comprehension (1932).

Scholars disagree primarily on the relationship of attitudes to schemata. Smith, for example, contended that because the beliefs contain implicit affective evaluations (positive or negative), cognitive schematic structures are "nothing more than attitudes" (1982, p. 39). Fiske and Linville, on the other hand, considered the schema "a self-sufficient cognitive construct that does not require affect; attitudes usually do assume an affective component" (1980, p. 551).

Regardless of its semantic label, the cognitive schema refers to the perspective a person uses to select, interpret, and remember messages. Because the patterns are influenced by these messages, they undergo constant revision. Changes in the pattern of the schema may be reflected in the creation of a new schema or reinforcemnt of or alteration in the existing one.

The consequence of the understanding that schemata are revised continually as a result of response to experience should encourage practitioners to keep communicating with their key publics. Rather than determining that writing for an audience with entrenched attitudes is akin to chasing butterflies, a common analogy expressed at public relations planning sessions, they might look at schemata as dynamic knowledge structures responsive to written--as well as observed--stimuli. New learning experiences provide opportunities to modify or elaborate schemata.

Cody (1980) used multidimensional scaling analysis to demonstrate significantly different directions for cognitive change when concepts

were initially linked in some internal structure than when they were unlinked. Other researchers, investigating the concept of inertia, assumed that the definition of any object is given by its relative location to other linked objects within a multidimensional space whose properties are determined by the patterns of the interrelationships among those objects of cognition (Woelfel, Holmes, Newton, Kincaid, Dinkelacker, & Kanaga, Note 3). Their experiment showed that inertial reference frames were precise enough to measure dynamic processes reliably.

Changes may result from the person's attending to a persuasive message. The effect, though, is a self-generated one rather than one implicit in the communication. It is the recipient's view of the world and the way he or she processes the information received that influence any attitude change, rather than external factors like the structure of the message, its source, or its content. These internal forces that change the structure of the cognitive space have been called "delayed effects of external forces as they are mediated by the internal structure of either the self or the social system" (Woelfel & Fink, 1980, pp. 155-56). Why? Any changes in a system in equilibrium must be attributed to external forces.

The Role of Schemata in Information Processing

Just how does this cognitive process work? At its most fundamental, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle arranged hierarchically rather than haphazardly. On receiving a persuasive communication, the receiver

tries to fit in the new information with existing knowledge he or she has on that topic (Greenwald, 1968; Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981). Accompanying cognitions, or thoughts, may or may not agree with the position of the communication; they may also be irrelevant to that communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). The schema, in fact, determines which data are congruent and which are incongruent (Fiske et al., 1980).

More specifically, schemata fill three identifiable functions in information processing. First, they dictate what will be attended to. In this selectivity process, called unitization (Newtson, 1973, 1976), people chop up the topic of the message into units (sometimes called episodes) that relate to their schema--its assumptions, expectations, wants, etc. The units, or items of information, are seemingly arbitrarily intermixed in their temporal order of appearance (Pryor & Ostrom, 1981).

Second, schemata dictate the interpretations receivers will make of incoming information. They reflect the assumptions of relationships or co-occurrences the individual has. As a consequence, they allow the receiver to fill in meaning either missing in the initial message or even contrary to it. (Inferences are especially likely where knowledge is incomplete or ambiguous.) What results is a message unique to the recipient because he or she has created it.

To keep receivers of public relations messages from making false inferences or wrong guesses, perhaps writers need to spend what may seem like an inordinate amount of time making sure their annual reports,

news releases, or memos are clear and complete. Fuzzy or skeletal writing would allow resulting ambiguities or information gaps to foster more filling-in than desirable, since inferences aren't necessarily relevant, accurate, or supportive.

Dervin agreed that since information is a product of human observing, within that context of constraints it may lack an "absolute, accurate, isomorphic relationship with reality" (1981, p. 75). Information is both understood and transmitted as subjective, relative to its creator. Rather than deploring this lack of objectivity, though, she suggested that audiences need subjective cues to link messages to their own contexts (p. 76).

This subjectivity, primarily in the form of war-related analogies, was the focus of a recent experiment designed by this researcher to test the competing principles of parsimony and redundancy in science writing by public information specialists. The study (Schneider, Note 2) argued that the effects of a brochure on vanishing prime farm land could have been predicted in part by considering its writing style. The pamphlet's author wove a metaphorical thread throughout to put the unknown in terms of the familiar and also to place intense figurative value judgements on the opposing forces of good (agricultural land owners and citizen activists) and evil (money-hungry land developers). Results of the experiment can help public relations writers decide when the benefit of using stylistic devices like the analogy and the metaphor outweigh the disadvantage of taking extra words to explain a scientific concept.

To determine the role that subjectivity via stylistic devices plays in the reader's awareness of problems and attitudes toward those issues, two sections of an undergraduate public relations course were selected. (These journalism students were chosen over agricultural majors because of the former's / relatively immature schemata related to the problem of disappearing farm lands.) First, students' awareness of America's loss of prime agricultural land, their amount of information about it, and their attitude toward the situation were tested. Then one section read a version of the brochure devoid of analogies and metaphors but conveying essentially the same factual content. The other section read part of the original copy of the brochure.

Both sections were instructed to employ Carter's (1973) stopping technique, using slash marks (/) to indicate where they paused in their reading. They were told to give reasons why they had stopped reading in the margins. Suggested reasons included pausing to reread, to question, to think, or because they were confused or understood. Students were also told they might stop to agree or to disagree--a test more of their affective than cognitive reactions.

About two weeks later, students' recognition of vanishing prime acreage for farming as a problem was tested. Their level of knowledge about this problem was gauged as well. Finally, their evaluation or judgement of the situation was measured.

Because of the small numbers of students involved (fewer than 20 in each class), findings were inconclusive. However, it was clear that the redundancy built into the original version of the brochure via analogy

and metaphor did cause the test subjects to stop and think at those writing devices. It also helped to create value judgements. Surprisingly, students considered the problem somewhat less serious after having read the original copy than before reading it. However, their level of knowledge about the issue was slightly higher.

Most significantly, though, the large number of stops at the figures of speech while reading the original version suggested that these subjective passages contributed to readers' cognitive and affective responses. Stops in the skeletal version were sprinkled throughout, but almost two-thirds of all stops occurred at the metaphors and analogies of the original. Stops there came primarily for rereading. The fleshed-out version also prompted fewer stops because of confusion, so perhaps here redundancy was worth the extra time involved in rereading and thinking about what was being read. Overall findings of the study, then, emphasized that the subjective devices facilitated thinking and apparently reduced confusion about other parts of the writing.

The third information-processing function schemata fill, after unitization and interpretation, is memory. Schemata determine what will be remembered of the message. Human memory, according to Norman (1976), is a reconstructive--rather than reactive--process. That is, the same filling-in process as interpretation occurs when people try to remember stored information. They may have forgotten some aspects of the initial observation. When that happens, the cognitive framework, or schema, guides in the reconstruction of a message that might not be a mere copy of the received message. During the dynamic process of remembering, abstraction supplants raw data.

Snyder and Uranowitz (1978) proposed that stereotypes, much like schemata, affect reconstructive memory. They described a memory-priming mechanism that makes available information otherwise inaccessible by activating a stereotype or label that has subsumed that information. However, a subsequent replication of their study by Clark and Woll (1981) failed to confirm this notion. Bellezza and Bower (1981) also found no empirical support for the existence of the mechanism, although their two experiments did expose a response bias in the direction of the label their subjects received.

Self-Schemata Versus Other-Schemata

Cognitive schemata are dynamic guides to the processing of information about the self and about others, individuals or organizations. Many similarities exist between the self- and other-schemata. The former refer to "cognitive generalizations about the self . . . that organize and guide the processing of self-related information" (Markus, 1977). The result of this self-referencing process also has been described as the "abstracted essence of a person's perception of him or herself" (Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977).

Woelfel and Fink (1980), based on the work of Mead (1934), have further differentiated between the self as object (the me) and the self as agency (the I). Using the passive, or me aspect, they argued that the self "can be defined in exactly the same way as any other object in the environment" (p. 123). This assertion is consistent with the principle of relativization they use to measure attitudes.

Other-schemata describe the person's view of the external, rather than his or her internal, world--ideas and assumptions about society

(Schneider, 1973). Together, these two types of frameworks help individuals organize and interpret their environment.

The main similarity between self- and other-schemata is the fact that both act as major cognitive reference points for interpreting all information entering the human cognitive system (Snygg & Combs, 1959; Ross, 1977; and Kuiper & Rogers, 1979). However, because of the prominence of the self in all cognitive processes, the role of self-schemata is at least a mediating force in the processing of all persuasive communication (Smith, 1982).

One important difference between the two is the amount of knowledge people have in each type of framework. The self-schema is typically richer, fuller, than its external counterpart because of the way people process information about themselves versus others. Kuiper et al. (1979) have shown that even as people become better acquainted with those who were once strangers, their relationships never become so complex as the information they hold about themselves.

This concept of self- versus other-schemata holds implications for carrying out all informational programs, especially in regard to the third, or memory, function of information processing. Since linking to stereotypes alone fails to dictate what will be remembered about a given message, consider what would make one newsletter item or press release more memorable than another.

First, linking the communication to the recipient's sense of self seems logical. The self-schema is typically more fully developed than its other-schema counterpart. This extent of development, or complexity,

affects the extremity of the resultant attitudes.

Since even some self-schemata are more complex than other self-schemata, though, the public relations writer should understand the additional factors that affect complexity. The number of relevant pieces of information or experiences the person has on a given subject, the more complex the hierarchical schema on that subject should be. As a result, mere exposure to a series of communications on a single topic (as in an integrated informational campaign) should produce more mature schemata than those resulting from a single article, report, or release. For example, in their 1982 study of the drunk-driving issue in Maryland, Grunig and Ipes discovered that audience members with these organized cognitions recalled more media information from the public communication campaign than did people with only simplistic cognitions.

Reconstructing Messages

Self- Versus Other-Schemata. Lord (1980) has further explained the difference between the two frameworks, self and other. He suggested that information about the self and about others is stored in memory and later reconstructed or remembered in strikingly different ways. He contended that information about the self is reconstructed verbally and information about others is reconstructed via visual or iconic representations. Why? People don't actually see themselves. Rather, they rely on linguistic representations like "I am a good manager." Because they can observe others, they have retinal pictures to call forth in reconstructing the external world from other-schemata. (For finer distinctions in this notion, see the study on perceptual differences between actors and

observers by Jones and Nisbett, 1971).

So, if the writings of a public relations practitioner are linked to the self-schema, then words alone should help the receiver reconstruct the information from his or her long-term memory. After all, we have only verbal messages to rely on when thinking of ourselves. Knowledge linked to other-schemata, though, is recalled via pictures or icons in addition to linguistic constructions. This points up the importance of graphics in communication. Charts, graphs, line drawings, and photographs all help target audiences store and reconstruct messages about other people or organizations. Accompanying art is not so critical to remembering information linked to oneself.

Polarization. In addition to the factual content of a message, the attitude change brought about albeit indirectly (through the the process of self-generated messages in agreement or disagreement with the initial communication) by that message may persist or decay over time. According to Petty et al. (1981), people remember these internal arguments longer than those that originate outside of themselves because they hold a higher regard for internal information.

Persistence of the attitude, or remembering, then is most likely when the recipient of the message "rehearses" the thoughts generated by the message. Rehearsed thoughts are transferred from short- to long-term memory, and unrehearsed thoughts or attitudes are forgotten; they decay because they do not arrive in long-term memory (Greenwald, 1968).

Thinking about a message, or rehearsing its contents, has been found not only to retain the message in long-term memory but to polarize

the subject's view of the message or attitude about it. Tesser and Conlee (1975) found that the more time a person has to think about some stimulus, the more polarization of attitude that results. Konecni (1975) built on this idea by devising experiments to pinpoint time limits on the amount of polarization that occurs. Tesser (1978) later found that the more objective the processing of information (which takes longer than brief, more subjective processing), the less polarization.

Timing, then, is a key variable in the practitioners' understanding of how schemata dictate ensuing thoughts about and affective reactions to the messages they generate. What Tesser (1976) called reality constraints present during the time period between introduction of a message and the eventual attitude toward it also affect the extent of polarization that ensues. He found some support for the notion that when the object of the communication is present, recipients generate thoughts veridical to the object rather than unrealistically polarized for or against it.

Additional research by Tesser and Leone (1977) on mere thought has shown that thinking leads to more polarization only when recipients have a relevant schema for generating thoughts. Since more than one schema is available for the individual, though, the polarization occurs only in the direction of what Tesser (1978) called the tuned-in schema.

Thus internal information, held in high regard because it comes from a reliable source, tends to persist over time. Unrehearsed thoughts, those that never arrive in long-term memory, decay; they tend to depend more on external stimuli than on internal consideration of the stimuli. Furthermore, the more thought engendered by the message, the more

polarization of the message's affective component.

Thinking about a message over time, though, only results in this polarization of attitudes when the receiver has a relevant schema in which to place the contents of the message. As a consequence, the public relations practitioner should assess the presence and complexity of various schemata in members of the key publics. Formative demographic research is inadequate. Instead, multidimensional scaling analysis of concepts relative to each other and to the self seems appropriate. In this way researchers could plot hierarchies of beliefs, their maturity, and their centrality.

To judge the effect of press releases ultimately appearing in the mass media, then, public relations staffers should wait long enough to allow the readers or viewers time to mull over the contents of the message. Testing for recall or attitude change too soon after the article appears in print or is mentioned on the nighlty newscast might give false cues as to its effectiveness.

Planning the timing for releasing that information also is critical. Know that the earlier the introduction of a proposed item, the more thought that can transpire between then and its implementation. Since polarization of the accompanying attitude comes about by rehearsing ideas over time, the number of weeks, days, or hours between reading about an upcoming shift in benefits, for example, and its institution will affect how strongly employees support or oppose that change.

In addition to timing of the message and the judgements it generates, public relations practitioners must consider whether or not the object of the message should be present when it is being discussed. The

constraints imposed by its presence tend to keep attitudes toward the middle of the continuum between favorable and unfavorable extremes. In other words, the reality of having the president of the corporation in the same room as a group of employees gathered to hear about that CEO's new policies should produce less extreme reactions pro or con.

To build on the same hypothetical situation, imagine now that the director of internal communication intends for the description of the new policies to be "filed" under the schema marked efficiency. Although that might happen, it is also possible for the staff to store his or her remarks in the cognitive network of concepts called job autonomy, status, or security. Depending on the schema selected, ensuing behavior might or might not be consistent with the director's predicted--and hoped for--attitude.

Complexity

The extent to which the schema is developed has been shown to have an important bearing on cognitive responses to persuasive messages. In the Tesser experiment alluded to earlier, female subjects viewing slides of paintings supported the reality-constraint hypothesis but male subjects did not. Tesser surmised that since women have more extensively developed schemata related to art than do men, their resultant attitudes became more polarized than those of their male counterparts.

But how does one schema get to be more or less complex than another? First, remember that self-schemata tend to be more complex than other-schemata. However, some self-schemata are richer than others, just as

some other-schemata are more complex than others. Crockett's definition of cognitive complexity explains the relative richness of schemata:

> A cognitive system will be considered relatively complex in structure when (a) it contains a relatively large number of elements and (b) the elements are integrated hierarchically by relatively extensive bonds of relationships. (1965, p. 49)

The number of relationships Crockett alluded to seems to be determined by the number and type of interactions a person has with the topic. The more interactions, generally the more complex the resultant schema. Furthermore, those elements of experience are arranged hierarchically, with more specific schemata falling beneath each more major or general schema. (According to Tesser [1978], without schemata all incoming messages would be equally relevant.)

Poole and Hunter (1979) investigated changes in hierarchically organized cognitions. They found that the messages aimed at the top of the hierarchy influence the entire structure; those entering the bottom only affect that specific attitude. In their study of the federal government bureaucracy, they further discovered that attitude change continued to filter down through the hierarchy over time. Hunter, Levine, and Sayers (1976) found a correlation between retention of the attitude change and how imbedded the attitude is in a complex and central belief structure.

As in any hierarchy, of course, some attitudes may be on the same level as others. When that occurs, and a message might relate to two

or more of those attitudes, then the individual is faced with a situation of competing attitudes. This helps to explain Stamm's (Stamm & Grunig, 1977) theory of cognitive strategies. Earlier (Stamm & Bowes, 1972) he had found that individuals often hold more than one belief--often seemingly incompatible ones--about a single issue. To explain this anomaly in his environmental study, he conceptualized two kinds of cognitive strategies. Hedging occurs when a person holds more than one belief about a situation (expressed as more than one solution to a problem). Wedging is the supporting of a single belief or solution.

This helps to account for the behavior/attitude inconsistency so often referred to in the literature of social psychology. Although a subject may act in a manner contrary to one attitude, he or she may be behaving consistently with another attitude. Most important for the public relations practitioner to understand, though, is that the person with few competing attitudes is more likely to act at all than is the person with many conflicting attitudes (Rokeach & Kliejunas, 1972).

Bem and Allen (1974) have expanded the concept of consistency between behavior and schemata by delineating two personality types: schematics and aschematics. The former sort perceptual situations into equivalence classes consistent with a certain trait in the hierarchy. Aschematics do not. As a result, their behavior is less consistent across situations. The actions of schematics, on the other hand, tend to be schema-consistent cross-situationally. In addition, schematics tend to resist information contrary to their self-schemata.

Consider now the public relations director charged with announcing to employees proposed changes in operating procedures designed to make the workplace more efficient. In so doing, the director might have created a cognitive strategy known as hedging--the holding of more than one belief on a single issue. When this happens, employees are less likely to generate opposition to the new, unpopular regulations. Wedging against the proposals, on the other hand, might mean that workers would actively picket their place of employment, deliberately slow down on the job, or at least grouse about conditions at the plant to their neighbors. By finding out whether members of the target audience--be they employees, newspaper reporters on the business beat, or the community where the organization operates--are schematics or aschematics also should help the practitioner predict cognitive responses to organizational communication.

Understanding that individuals can think about a single stimulus in relation to various schemata also suggests that "attitudes are not as fixed and relatively enduring as we typically suppose" (Tesser, 1978, p. 297). Tesser (1978) emphasized that this theorizing further assumes that no single attitude toward an object exists. Instead, the number of attitudes present depends on the number of available schemata relevant to that object.

Cognitively complex structures have been called mature (Smith, 1982); the more mature the schema, the better able the individual is to understand others and to integrate a variety of cues from others into his or her own perspectives. Likewise, cognitively mature individuals come to know themselves more consistently than do the cognitively immature. Most

important, though, is the notion that the relative complexity, or richness, of one's cognitive structure--whether referring to self- or other-schemata--affects the ease with which persuasive messages can form, reinforce, or change attitudes.

Centrality

> Smith has called the potency of any attitude a function of: (1) the number of beliefs an individual has regarding some area of experience; (2) the extent to which one's beliefs are hierarchically arranged in an interrelated, supporting structure; (3) the degree to which individuals judge their beliefs to be "true," that is, reliable assumptions about the self and others; and (4) the intensity of one's affective evaluation of each belief. (1982, p. 39)

One variable that influences this potency, or stability, is the centrality of the attitude--how close the attitude is to the person's value system and to his or her concept of the self (Rokeach, 1968). As mentioned earlier, elements of a schema are arranged hierarchically. Peripheral beliefs and feelings are subordinated to central values. Values, or ego-involving schemata, are the most persistent and thus most immune to persuasion.

Anchoring

In general, the less central the attitude the easier it is to alter (Smith, 1982). Much contemporary research has suggested that to change ego-involving values requires linking the new issues to well-established

ones. Nelson (1968), for example, demonstrated that getting subjects to participate actively in anchoring, or connecting a new belief to other, established values, increased those subjects' resistance to persuasion at a later time. The pretreatment immunized receivers of persuasive messages against significant attitude change.

Danes, Hunter, and Woelfel (1978) contended that resistance to belief change depends more on the extent of the informational base than on either belief certainty or proportional change. In their test of these three mathematical models of belief change, they found strongest support for the accumulated information model: belief change was inversely proportional to the amount of information subjects had about a topic when they received a message.

Chanowitz and Langer (1981) also argued that since information initially perceived as irrelevant may be uncritically accepted, it is difficult to change attitudes toward that knowledge. Even if the information later becomes relevant, premature cognitive commitment may limit the amount of change to be realistically expected. In their study of health communication, they found that messages received later may seem untrue or like rationalizations and so reconsideration of the original message is unlikely.

Level of Involvement

Related to centrality is level of involvement, or the extent to which a person seems himself or herself in a situation. According to Dervin (1981), perceived connections between external information and the self determine the utility of that input in constructing cognitive order.

Involvement is also a factor that influences the importance of source credibility in persuasion. The research of Sternthal, Dholakia, and Leavitt (1978) and of Bock and Saine (1975) has shown that in situations of low involvement or prior knowledge, source expertise plays a greater role than in situations of high involvement or prior knowledge. Their explanation is that people who don't view themselves as intimately involved in a situation and who have little information about the situation allow their pre-existing biases, schemata, to guide whatever thinking they do in response to the message from the credible source. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) found that when people are more involved in the situation they do more thinking about the message and thus they examine the source's advocacy more critically. Hass (1981) surmised that the existing attitude is less important than the thinking prompted by the source's message in these cases.

Take now the example mentioned earlier of the public relations director given the task of introducing a new plan for the workplace. Emphasizing the individual employee's part in that new regimen should increase his or her level of involvement in the situation. When people receive messages on problems that affect them personally, they tend to develop ordered cognitive schemata, as opposed to bits and pieces of information (Grunig & Ipes, Note 1). In this process of increasing the extent to which employees see issues as involving, the director must also consider the source of the message carefully. This would be the time to select an impeccably credible person to deliver the information--perhaps the workers' immediate supervisor--since that source's advocacy will be scrutinized.

Conclusion

The contention that the concept of schemata is "old wine in a new bottle" (cited in Fiske et al., 1980) should not discourage the public relations practitioner. Even if this notion were true, a new perspective on a relatively young profession can only enhance its practice.

Understanding how data fit an existing pattern can help public information officers, publicists, and public relations instructors alike structure the content of their messages most effectively. The recent cognitive revolution in social psychology also offers an explanation of "default values," or the reasonable guesses people make when their knowledge is incomplete or ambiguous. This inference process is just one area in the study of the concept schema that needs development. Other deficiencies are the lack of manipulation check and consensual operalization of schemata.

However, by agreeing that schemata are more than attitudes in a new guise, public relations researchers and practitioners can take advantage of this new term to expand their understanding of information processing and its ensuing implications for their day-to-day work. We can come closer to understanding what actually happens in a person's mind when he or she acquires knowledge. We learn, for example, that any attitude change comes about because of self-generated messages in response to the external messages. Persuasion, then, is a product of interpretive transformations recipients perform on communications directed to them.

Most important, though, is the realization that no attitude is carved in stone. The schematic view suggests that people do change as a function

of their individual cognitive responses to persuasive information. Because they control and direct their own behavior, the feelings and the acts that follow are more a result of internal than external forces. Message strategies tailored to fit that cognitive process come closer to affecting the outcome than those that assume direct causation.

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